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## Ethics: A state of mind

*An Editorial by Col. Richard Kniseley, Director, AFRL Space Vehicles Directorate*

KIRTLAND AFB, N.M. — Well over half a century ago, humanitarian and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Dr. Albert Schweitzer, having lived a rich and varied life in service to others, concluded that ethics are the decisions we make every day to maintain life at its highest point of development.

Words to live by, you might say, but what practical meaning might Dr. Schweitzer's thoughts have for us today here at Kirtland Air Force Base, especially at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century where life seems pretty well developed already?

While it is true that, materially, we are a highly developed society, it is also one filled with many temptations to do what is expedient rather than what is "right," to make decisions that are convenient rather than ones that are correct.

Throughout my more than 25 years in the Air Force as a commander, crew member, and now Director of the Air Force Research Laboratory's Space Vehicles Directorate, I've learned that ethics are a state of mind you carry with you each day. Much like personality, ethics cannot be taught effectively in a classroom. Instead, they either grow within each of us as we confront the opportunities and challenges of daily living—or they do not.

In my career, assignment responsibilities have required that I make decisions that directly affect the lives of others. As a result, I've come to appreciate the value of thinking carefully about my actions, before, during, and after they have left their mark on those around me, whether they are my spouse, my children, my peers, or those I am expected to lead. Much has been entrusted to me, much is also expected.

I have grown to appreciate that ethics are really what each of us truly believe deep down inside, that code of behavior that defines our very essence as an individual, what makes "us" us.

I've discovered also that some people who have made unethical decisions first went through the process of deciding whether their choice was right or wrong. Then, knowing their decision was questionable, they took the path of least resistance rather than staying the harder course that ultimately would have led to a just end. No winners there.

We must remember that, whether on or off base, our personal behavior, in or out of uniform, tells the world who we really are: Ever-present, visible ambassadors for an Air Force whose new motto is "where no one comes close."

Whether mentoring junior officers or enlisted personnel, or setting an example for civilian workers, Air Force leaders must set the stage by speaking openly in group forums when faced with an ethical dilemma. Speak openly to see that the correct decisions are reached for the right reasons.

This is a heavy responsibility, one that does not come easily to any of us. But if you work on it, a day at a time, your ethics will lead you to the right action and the right behavior.

Bottom line: If it does not "feel right" in your heart—it isn't. Pay close attention to that little voice inside you—it's your ethics. It's who you are. It's also who the Air Force is, because when all is said and done, the Air Force is really YOU! @



Colonel Kniseley